United Nations S/PV.7725

Security Council

Seventy-first year

Provisional

7725th meeting
Thursday, 23 June 2016, 10.20 a.m.
New York

President:	Mr. Delattre	(France)
Members:	Angola	Mr. Lucas
	China	Mr. Xu Zhongsheng
	Egypt	Mr. Aboulatta
	Japan	Mr. Bessho
	Malaysia	Mrs. Adnin
	New Zealand	Mrs. Schwalger
	Russian Federation	Mr. Safronkov
	Senegal	Mr. Seck
	Spain	Mr. De la Calle García
	Ukraine	Mr. Vitrenko
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Mr. Rycroft
	United States of America	Ms. Sison
	Uruguay	Mr. Rosselli
	Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of)	Mr. Méndez Graterol

Agenda

The situation in the Middle East

Report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014) and 2258 (2015) (S/2016/546)

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The meeting was called to order at 10.20 a.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation in the Middle East

Report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014) and 2258 (2015) (S/2016/546)

The President (*spoke in French*): In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite Mr. Stephen O'Brien, Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator, to participate in this meeting.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda.

I wish to draw the attention of Council members to document S/2016/546, which contains the report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014) and 2258 (2015).

I now give the floor to Mr. O'Brien.

Mr. O'Brien: We meet today in the shadow of Jo Cox's murder last Thursday. She was a brilliant British Member of Parliament killed in the line of public duty just days before her forty-second birthday, leaving a husband and two very young children — a loss to all of us and particularly to the innocent people of Syria, who never met her but for whom she worked relentlessly, courageously and effectively. She was a humanitarian to her core and, working with the brave local non-governmental organization the White Helmets, Jo was one of the greatest advocates for this long, destructive, senseless war to stop, and stop immediately.

That is what Afin said to me in the Reyhanli hospital near Hatay, Turkey, on the Syrian border near the Bab Al-Hawa crossing, when I was there the other day. He is a White Helmet working in Syria who had just lost his leg below the knee in an improved-explosive-device explosion and was trying to get used to his prosthesis. Jo took his message to the House of Commons and to the Security Council chamber. She joined politics to speak truth to power, fearlessly, to the Security Council; I dedicate this statement to Jo, to her values, to her inspiration, and above all, her call for peace in Syria now.

There is something fundamentally wrong in a world where attacks on hospitals and schools, on mosques and public markets, on ethnic, religious and confessional groups have become so commonplace that they cease to incite any reaction. Month after month, indeed, year after year, we have each spoken about the ending of the carnage and about the importance of justice and the need for accountability in Syria. Syrians have begged for action — Syrians such as Dr. Mazin, who, as I reported to the Council last month (see S/PV.7701), had been helping people, trying to save lives at the Al-Quds hospital, before he himself sustained grievous injuries to both his brain and abdomen; all he said from his hospital bed, after mustering the energy to speak, was, "Please, peace".

And yet the world continues to watch Syria disintegrate into bloodshed. In many parts of the country, violence continues unbridled as the parties seemingly fail to grasp that there can be no military solution to the conflict. Civilian neighbourhoods are pummelled. Medical and other health-care facilities are destroyed. Education is disrupted, and livelihoods are devastated. Would each and every one of those present here not try to flee as well?

The latest report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, issued on 16 June, notes that in the east, the terrorist organization the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) has committed genocide as well as multiple crimes against humanity and war crimes against the Yazidis. The report describes the thousands of Yazidis held captive in Syria, where they are subjected to unimaginable horrors. Yazidi women continue to be sexually enslaved, and Yazidi boys are indoctrinated, trained and used in hostilities. Thousands of Yazidi men and boys are missing.

In the north-west, in Aleppo governorate, an ISIL offensive on Azaz and the surrounding area led to numerous civilian casualties, threatening up to 200,000 civilians. In addition, since the beginning of the anti-ISIL offensive in Menbij, 45,000 people have been displaced, and 65,000 others are now encircled by the Syrian Democratic Forces. Moreover, airstrikes and shelling increased on the Castello road, the only remaining access route for areas of Aleppo held by

non-State armed groups, and the adjacent villages of Anadan, Hritan, Kafr Hamra and Khan Al-Assal, risking again the complete encirclement of the area and the entrapment of more than 300,000 civilians.

Imprecise weaponry, notably the unrelenting use of barrel bombs by Government forces, has resulted in hideous loss of life. For example, in Daraya, now dubbed "Syria's capital of barrel bombs", dozens of barrel bombs have reportedly been dropped during the last few weeks alone. Much has been said about the use of these weapons, but let me repeat: their use in this manner constitutes indiscriminate attacks. Their sole purpose is to terrorize and punish the civilian population. All attacks against civilians and civilian objects, as well as the indiscriminate use of weapons in populated areas, including shelling and aerial bombardments, must end. They must end now. And before anyone tries to suggest that this is not the truth, these barrel bombs are documented facts, indisputable facts, for which, however long it takes, the decision-makers and perpetrators will be held to account one day.

This cruel conflict continues to tear families apart and inflict brutal suffering on the innocent. Just last week, at least six children were killed and tens of others injured in heinous attacks near the Sayidda Zeinab shrine, south of Damascus, as well as on a public market in Idlib. Millions more are in the line of fire, facing crushing poverty and alarming physical danger. Children have been forcibly detained; they have been tortured, subjected to sexual violence and in some cases executed. Childhoods have been lost as ISIL and some non-State armed groups have targeted children for recruitment into their forces.

How much longer will the children of Syria have to suffer like this? How much longer will we tolerate the utter disregard for the most basic precepts of humanity, the complete disrespect of international law and, indeed, the Council's resolutions? On 3 May, the Council unanimously adopted resolution 2286 (2016), on the protection of the wounded and the sick, medical personnel and humanitarian personnel in armed conflict. And yet, since then, the United Nations and its partners have received reports of dozens of new attacks. Documentation from Physicians for Human Rights received in late April identified 365 attacks on 259 medical facilities, as well as the deaths of 738 medical personnel. The Syrian Government forces were reportedly responsible for at least of these 289 attacks — more than 76 per cent — resulting in an estimated 667 medical personnel killed.

Moreover, since 1 May, the United Nations and its partners have received reports of many more attacks on medical and other health-care facilities. This includes the destruction on 23 May of a hospital in Tartous, as well as the attacks on 8 June on three medical facilities in Aleppo: the Al-Bayan and the Al-Hakeem hospitals, within a distance of 300 metres, and the Abdulhadi Fares clinic, all in the eastern part of the city. Again, these are facts, all facts, undeniable facts.

The United Nations Special Rapporteur on the right to health, Dainius Pūras, recently warned that

> "medical units are being damaged and destroyed in large numbers throughout Syria, revealing what has become a repugnant hallmark of this horrific conflict. The sheer number of such facilities being hit, as well as information relating to some of the incidents, suggests that some hospitals and other medical facilities may have been directly targeted".

I am also gravely concerned about the situation at the berm along the Jordanian border, where the number of asylum seekers has increased exponentially in recent months, tripling to a current estimate of over 70,000 people. The population at the berm includes high numbers of extremely vulnerable people. Over half are children. The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees estimates that the population will top 100,000 by the end of the year. Moreover, the security situation at the berm has deteriorated considerably, as was painfully illustrated on Tuesday when at least six Jordanian soldiers were killed during an attack on a nearby border guard post. This attack took place close to a waiting area for Syrians hoping to gain entry into Jordan.

Surely all of this should shake the moral conscience of the world. Surely the international community must question its humanity, when religious, ethnic and confessional communities risk eradication, when internally displaced person settlements are no longer safe from bombardment, when refugees and migrants drown in the Mediterranean by the thousands, and, to quote UNICEF, when "babies have to be taken out of incubators because of attacks on hospitals". This is obscene. This is not a world we should nor can accept.

United Nations agencies and non-governmental organization partners continue their tireless efforts

to meet the urgent humanitarian needs of the Syrian population. The June plan for humanitarian access was submitted on 19 May and sought access to 1.1 million people in 34 locations. On 2 June, an initial response was received from Syrian authorities. Of the 34 locations to which access was sought, 16 locations were granted full access, 13 were granted partial access, meaning that items such as food were not authorized or that the number of people we were authorized to deliver to was below our estimate of actual people in need, and 5 were not granted any access. Following a second round of consultations, on 6 June the previously excluded town of Al-Waer was granted partial access, and partial approvals for Darayya and Douma were expanded to include food for some beneficiaries.

With respect to besieged areas in particular, following intense negotiations at various levels for access to besieged areas requested under the June plan, the United Nations received approvals to reach 15 by land, either in full or to part of the population in need. I should also note that during the month the total number of besieged areas was revised downward, as Zabdin was retaken by the Syrian Government. This leaves a total of 18 locations besieged. The only besieged location requested but not approved under the June Plan is Al-Zabadani in Rural Damascus. Al-Zabadani is included in what is known as the Four Towns agreement and, as I stated earlier, any delivery to those towns continues to be planned and implemented under that framework. Requests for the other two besieged areas — Yarmouk and Deir ez-Zor — are not under the convoy plan but are covered by separate airdrops led by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East and the World Food Programme, respectively, both of which continue.

As I speak, inter-agency convoys are delivering much needed multisectoral assistance to Jirud, in Rural Damascus and Sheikh Maqsoud, a neighbourhood in the city of Aleppo, which has been the subject of constant shelling in the past months. This is the first of a multiphase delivery to bring food, nutritional items, health, hygiene and other humanitarian supplies for some 22,500 beneficiaries. On 19 June, a United Nations-Syrian Arab Red Crescent (SARC) convoy proceeded to Kafr Batna sub-district, providing food and health assistance for 25,000 beneficiaries in two besieged locations, Ein Terma and Hamouria, as well as three hard-to-reach communities, namely Hazeh, Beit Sawa and Eftreis. On 16 June, a United Nations-SARC convoy delivered food, health, nutrition, non-food items (NFI), water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) materials, and agricultural assistance for 50,000 beneficiaries in Afrin and neighbouring towns in Aleppo Governorate. That same day, an inter-agency convoy delivered humanitarian assistance to 37,500 residents in the besieged neighbourhood of Al Waer in Homs. A follow-up convoy is planned in the coming days, pending Government approval. Together, these convoys to Al Waer will provide food, medicine, health, nutrition, WASH and emergency supplies for 75,000 people.

Earlier this month, a United Nations-SARC convoy delivered food, health, nutrition, WASH and NFI materials for 33,500 beneficiaries in Al-Dar Alkabirah, Tier Mallah and Al-Ghanto in northern Rural Homs. In addition, on 10 June, the United Nations and its partners completed the first of a multiphase delivery to bring food for 24,000 people, as well as nutrition items, health, hygiene and other humanitarian supplies for some 40,000 people in Douma. The day before, on 9 June, the United Nations and its partners delivered food, nutrition, health and medical, WASH and education assistance to Darayya as a follow-up to the 1 June convey that delivered health supplies, including vaccines and certain nutritional supplies for children. This was the first time that the United Nations and SARC were able to deliver supplies to Darayya in four years. Moreover, on 1 and 3 June, inter-agency convoys were deployed to Moadamiya to deliver food, health, nutritional supplies for 45,000 people.

Despite the continued best efforts of the United Nations and our humanitarian partners on the ground to reach all those in need in communities across Syria, the realities of the ongoing conflict and the continued interference and intransigence of the parties to the conflict present serious challenges to our ability to do so. The limitations by the Syrian authorities placed upon access in terms of where, who and how much aid can be delivered continues to make assistance to some communities quite simply a non-starter and is compounded by those same authorities then making every effort to delay, distract and dismantle convoys as we are attempting to undertake our work. Organizing the delivery of aid must remain the responsibility of the United Nations and its partners based on need; it must not be subject to political or other considerations.

We must understand that the delivery of aid is not a simple matter of pointing a truck in the right direction in the morning and hoping for the best. Security issues are a minute-by-minute concern for those on the ground organizing humanitarian convoys, trying to calculate the safest, most efficient way through a nightmarish conflict situation. This requires exceptional and brave people. In the most optimal conditions, it is a complex undertaking. In Syria, when presented with the reality of the conditions I have described today — and indeed I describe every month — during an active and volatile conflict, it is a Herculean challenge fraught with danger, conducted by these very extraordinary and brave people, whose work we must make safer, not even more dangerous, by allowing them the space to negotiate and, as I urged before, without the glare of publicity attending their every move. It is not one, however, at which, frankly, we can afford to fail. I call yet again on all with influence to continue to pressure the authorities to allow unrestricted, safe and unimpeded humanitarian access, free from interference.

Since January this year, some 844,325 people have been reached by the United Nations and its partners through inter-agency cross-line convoys. This includes 334,150 of the some 590,200 people living in besieged areas as designated by the United Nations, some more than once. While this certainly represents progress and is welcomed, it is but a trickle compared to the level of protection concerns, needs and suffering in besieged and hard-to-reach areas. Moreover, following careful review, we now estimate that some 5 million people are living in hard-to-reach areas, which is an increase of over 900,000 people from the previous estimate. This large increase is based on several factors, but primarily the inclusion of areas in parts of Aleppo, Al-Raqqa and Al-Hasakeh Governorates as a result of insecurity as well as constrained access for humanitarian actors both from within Syria and via cross-border operations.

It is therefore vital that the stuttering momentum sustained on humanitarian access over the past few months continue and improve, and be significantly expanded into the second half of this year. The key now is to turn these requests and approvals to besieged and hard-to-reach locations into full and sustained humanitarian deliveries to all Syrians in need. The team on the ground is working day and night to make this a reality, including by negotiating with the Syrian authorities to turn partial approvals into full approvals and to put an end to the removal of medical supplies, which, abominably, continues.

By the end of this month, we hope, we will have been able to reach all besieged locations. Council members may rest assured that, if given the full approvals to all areas, the United Nations and its partners do have the capacity to step up and fulfil those needs so long as the funding is flowing as cash and not just as the words of pledges. We have now also submitted the July access plan to the Syrian authorities; we did that on 19 June, requesting access to reach 1,220,750 beneficiaries in 35 besieged, hard-to-reach and crossline priority locations. This must be approved in full and without any conditions.

We also need the parties to the so-called Four Towns agreement to end the tit-for-tat so as to ensure that approved convoys can proceed and that civilians in need of medical treatment can get timely access for their health care. In order for that to happen and to ensure sustained access in the weeks and months to come, we will require the continued support of the Security Council, the International Syria Support Group and Member States. We also need to continue to support our brave non-governmental organization partners working tirelessly in besieged and hard-to-reach locations, whose ongoing programmes are absolutely vital to complement the important efforts of the United Nations and the Syrian Arab Red Crescent in reaching people in need.

As I have said numerous times before, we remain committed and ready to deliver aid through any possible modality, including airdrops for civilians in desperate need, whoever and wherever they are. The bottom line, however, is that the real extent of the progress cannot only be measured by ad hoc deliveries to besieged communities. The fact that dozens of barrel bombs were reportedly dropped on 20 June in Daraya — the day after the United Nations and the Syrian Arab Red Crescent delivered the first food aid to the town since November 2012 — shows that the situation for people in besieged and hard-to-reach areas will not be resolved by humanitarian aid delivery alone.

The real measure will be when these medieval sieges are no more; when boys do not risk sniper fire when bringing medicine to their mothers; when doctors can administer life-saving treatments without the fear of imminent attacks; when Yazidi girls do not have to scratch their faces out of fear of being bought and

sexually enslaved. That is the disgusting reality of life in Syria today. While the ultimate responsibility lies with the Syrian parties, future generations will judge us harshly if we have an inability of the international community to save and protect civilians in Syria.

The President (*spoke in French*): I thank Mr. O'Brien for his briefing.

I now invite Council members to informal consultations to continue our discussion on the subject.

The meeting rose at 10.40 a.m.